Valemount to Blue River Winter Recreation Sustainable Resource Management Plan

DRAFT

1.0 Background and Introduction 2
Planning Area and Requirements 2
2.0 Strategic Direction 4
Vision 4
Goals 4
Zoning System 4
Sustainable Development of the Winter Recreation Economy 5
Snowmobiling 5
Skiing 6
Other Opportunities 9
Commercial Guiding and Tenuring 9
Sustaining Environment and Wildlife 10
Improving Integration with other Industrial Users 11
3.0 Cooperative Management & Implementation 12
Management Principles 12
Community Development Corporation 13
Public Education and Safety 13
Management and Enforcement 14
Controlled Recreation Area 15
Integrated Management and Development 15
Plan Review and Monitoring 15

1.0 Background and Introduction

Planning Area and Requirements

This winter recreation Sustainable Resource Management Plan (SRMP) covers approximately 700 000 hectares of land between Mount Robson Park in the east and Wells Gray Park in the west and from Horsey Creek in the north, southwards down the North Thompson to Blue River (see map in Figure 1). Winter recreation activities are a major driver of the local economy from Valemount to Blue River. These activities include public and commercial (i.e. guided) recreation. Existing recreation related businesses and new recreation business investments depend upon sustaining these activities and managing their growth. In addition to providing economic benefits, these activities also represent opportunities for the general public to enjoy recreational experiences and thereby contribute to the wellbeing of many Canadians.

There are environmental issues associated with winter recreation in the area that need to be addressed. In particular, the potential impacts of winter recreation on Mtn. Caribou, which are a nationally threatened (as listed by COSEWIC) red listed species, are of concern.

Strategic planning and constructive conflict resolution are needed to:

- ensure sustainable development of public and commercial winter recreation activities in the area;
- improve the compatibility of winter recreation activities in the area;
- improve the safety and quality of experience for public and commercial recreationists;
- reduce risks to Mtn. Caribou from winter recreation activities; and to,
- improve integration of winter recreation development and other industrial activities while maintaining existing tenure rights.
- maintain public access

This SRMP winter recreation chapter, and the processes used to develop it, addresses this requirement. The urgency of the issues and the limitations of provincial government planning resources require that the focus be winter recreation however additional SRMP planning may occur in the future to address summer recreation. This draft SRMP draws heavily on the results of an intensive stakeholder consensus building and negotiation process that addressed existing and potential conflicts between snowmobiling, heli-skiing and non-motorized backcountry skiing[1]. The stakeholder process also considered the growth and potential for other activities and the need to manage the potential risks to Caribou (see appendix 1 for the Stakeholder Agreement). A coalition of local recreation interests that are based in Valemount, Canadian Mountain Holidays and Mike Wiegele Heliskiing were represented in the negotiations. One of the conditions of their Agreement is that the results be folded into this draft SRMP and subjected to full public review[2]. Agreement was also reached between Snowmobile interests in Blue River and MWH that is consistent with and reinforces the Stakeholder Agreement.

[1] This process occurred between December 2003 and March 2004.

[2] Details of the stakeholder agreement that are not related to this SRMP are being addressed outside of the planning process.

The essentials of the Stakeholder Agreement and this draft SRMP include:

- Recreation management zoning that emphasizes specific types of recreation use in specific areas.
- New and expanded snowmobile closures to maintain heli and backcountry ski experiences and to reduce risk to Mtn. Caribou in critical winter ranges.
- Withdrawal of Heli-ski tenure in key snowmobile areas to facilitate development of a managed snowmobile destination area. (note this is not the only area where snowmobiling is permitted).
- Establishment of a Community Development Corporation to support management and development of the snowmobile industry with financial support from the Heli-ski companies and other businesses. The corporation may also become involved with promotion/facilitation of other recreational opportunities, and implementation initiatives overtime.
- Measures to improve the safety of winter recreation activities including: public and community based avalanche training; increased coordination between guides; expansion and training of snowpatrol; enhanced rescue coordination and capacity; and improved signage and public information regarding hazards.

2.0 Strategic Direction

Vision

The Valemount to Blue River area will become a world-class, year-round tourist destination that supports healthy and vibrant communities. A wide range of recreation activities will be sustained in the area and the economic spin-offs from these activities will support local businesses and communities. These activities will coexist with each other and with the outstanding local environment and wildlife populations[3].

Goals

1. Cultivate a sustainable tourism economy by:
    a. improving services, management and infrastructure resulting in increased marketability and sustainable growth;
    b. increasing the compatibility between all recreation activities;
    c. enhancing the safety of all recreation activities.

2. Support sustainable communities by:
    a. encouraging respect and mutual support amongst all recreationists and commercial tenure holders.
    b. developing mutually beneficial relationships between tourism businesses and local communities.
    c. respecting public access.

3. Maintain a sustainable environment by:
    a. Managing all uses to minimize impacts on the environment, wildlife populations and habitat.

Zoning System

Winter Recreations Zones are proposed to increase recreation opportunities, reduce conflict between recreation activities, and reduce risks to Caribou. These Zones specify activities that are either emphasized, managed or excluded. The Zones include:

Managed Snowmobile Zone: These are areas where emphasis is placed on supporting snowmobile access and use. These areas are managed under Management Agreements between local organizations (e.g. the new Community Development Corporation) and the Provincial Government. Fees are charged to snowmobile users, which are used to pay for grooming, warming huts, snowmobile patrol and other services.

Helicopter and Backcountry Ski Zone: These are areas where emphasis is placed on helicopter assisted skiing and ski touring. Snowmobiling is either on a guided only basis or not permitted. Other forms of non-motorized public recreational use are unrestricted[4].

[3] This vision is more encompassing than this winter recreation SRMP chapter in order to facilitate integration of future planning and development initiatives that oriented to achieving the same vision.
[4] Approval of commercial recreation will follow LWBC policy.

Non-motorized Backcountry Recreation Zone: These are areas where emphasis is placed on non-motorized backcountry recreation such as ski touring. Heli-skiing and snowmobiling are excluded.

Snow cat-ski Zone: These are areas where emphasis is placed on Snow Cat assisted skiing.

Snowmobile Assisted Skiing/Boarding Zone: These are areas where emphasis is placed on snowmobile assisted skiing and boarding.

Snowmobile Closure Zone: These areas are closed to snowmobiling to reduce conflicts with other users and to reduce risks to Caribou. Closures may be for a specified time period or for the full season. These zones may overlap with other zones.

Guided Snowmobiling Zone: *Within the stakeholder agreement and the draft SRMP there are several innovative proposals. These conceptual proposals are being presented for public review and comment.* Implementation mechanisms and alternatives for the SRMP are under investigation within the provincial government. The proposed guided only snowmobiling zone is one of these. These areas are open to snowmobiling on a guided only basis. Guides must have the necessary safety training, equipment licensing and tenuring. 5

Sustainable Development of the Winter Recreation Economy

Snowmobiling

Sustainable development of snowmobiling in the area requires a number of different actions including:

1. **Expansion and enhanced management of managed snowmobile areas (managed snowmobile zone) and development of a "Snowmobile Destination Area".** Proposed expansion areas include new areas at Oasis, Robina, Horsey Creek, Allen Creek, North Thompson and on the Westridge (map A). Several of these areas (Oasis, Allen Creek, Robina, Clemina, North Thompson and Chapel) can be managed as an integrated destination area with strategically located parking lots that service more than one of the areas. CMH and MWH have volunteered to withdraw their tenure in these areas to help expedite establishment of this destination area. Enhanced management, will be provided though the new Community Development Corporation which will assume responsibility for all the managed snowmobile area Management Agreements with the Province (formally held by local clubs) freeing up the time of the volunteer organizations so they can focus on specific activities such as snowpatrol, infrastructure development and events[6].

2. **Snowmobile trail systems**. In addition to managed snowmobile areas, improved trail networks have the potential to link the managed areas and provide

[5] Note: implementation mechanisms for this proposed guided only zone are under investigation within the Provincial Government.

[6] Note: This assumes that the CDC is established as intended.

a snowmobile touring experience and opportunity. The existing trail network needs to be upgraded and new connections developed. Preliminary trail development proposals are indicated on map B.

3. **Guided Only Snowmobile Areas.** A few areas are proposed as guided only snowmobile areas to manage the potential conflict with heli and backcountry skiing, to ensure the safety of snowmobilers, and to create new business opportunities in the community. These areas include: beyond Bunny Buster/Felicity basin, Dixon Glacier, the Manteau, Go Go Juice Plateau, and the Horseshoe. It is proposed that use levels in the Buster area near Foster Creek area and the Horseshoe area be maintained at traditional levels through the local snowmobile clubs in Valemount and Blue River – Timberline Snowgoers (Buster) and Blue River Powder Packers (Horseshoe). *NOTE: Within the stakeholder agreement and the draft SRMP there are several innovative proposals. These conceptual proposals are being presented for public review and comment. Implementation mechanisms and alternatives for the SRMP are under investigation within the provincial government.*

4. **Snowmobile Industry Development Action Plan.** Local businesses are working together through the CDC[7] to develop and implement an Action Plan to develop the snowmobile industry in the area. This Action Plan includes cooperative market research and marketing, infrastructure development, fund raising and financing, enhanced snowpatrol, guides training and a tenure application.

SRMP Objectives

1. Establish/expand/adjust new managed snowmobile areas at Oasis, Robina, Horsey Creek, Allen Creek, North Thompson and on the Westridge. Manage Oasis, Robina, Allen Creek, Clemina Creek, North Thompson and Chappell as an integrated snowmobile destination area.
2. Do not allocate new heli-ski tenure in the areas where heli-ski tenure has been voluntarily withdrawn to facilitate snowmobile destination area development.
3. Develop a snowmobile trail system that links communities and the managed areas recognizing potential impacts on Caribou.
4. Establish guided only snowmobile areas at Dixon Glacier, the Manteau, Go Go Juice Plateau and Horseshoe and beyond Bunny Buster/Felicity basin.
5. Manage the Buster area and the Horseshoe area to maintain traditional snowmobile use levels in partnership with Timberline Snowgoers, Blue River Powder Packers, and MWH.

Skiing

Sustainable development of skiing in the area requires a number of different actions including:

1. **Securing Heli-ski and Backcountry Ski Experiences.** Maintenance of Heli-ski and Backcountry ski opportunities requires closure of some intensively used ski areas to snowmobiling. The areas identified on map C are proposed for

[7] The CDC interim manager is Silvio Gislemberti @ Valemount Village Office.

recreational snowmobile closure to protect the experience of Heli and backcountry skiers and to ensure the safety of all. Some of these areas are only closed for part of the snowmobile season as outlined in Table 1.[8]

Location	Closure dates[9]
Areas	
Twilight Area	December 1st to April 30th
Portions of Westridge	December 1st to April 30th
Portions of Canoe	December 1st to April 30th
Portions of North Thompson and Adolph	December 1st to April 30th
"Highway"	December 1st to April 23rd
Swift Creek	December 1st to April 15th
Yellowjacket Creek	December 1st to April 15th
Bulldog Creek	December 1st to April 15th
David Henry Creek[10]	December 1st to April 15th
Bunny Buster South (Ski touring Only), Tahiti and Aloha	All season
Cat Ski Zone	Until end of Cat Ski Operations
Closures in MWH tenure area	Until end of operations

2. **Establishment of the Westridge Ski Destination Area.** The Westridge area has a diversity of excellent skiing opportunities including helicopter, snowmobile and cat assisted skiing as well as ski touring. A destination ski area is proposed for the eastern slopes of Westridge and Mica mountain (Map D) that includes the following zones:

   - Cat-Ski Zone. This involves expansion of cat skiing at Ski Hill and Mica Mountains. This cat ski development overlaps the previously proposed alpine ski development on Ski Hill mountain which may one day become a real development opportunity. In the interim, cat skiing can increase opportunities to ski in this area.
   - Non-motorized zone. This includes a non-motorized backcountry ski area in the vicinity of the Yellowhead Outdoor Recreation Association (YORA) Cabin at Westridge. Heliskiing in this backcountry area will not occur on Bunny Buster South. In addition, and with advanced notice[11] from YORA, CMH will do its best to avoid using the Andiamo and Christmas runs.
   - Snowmobile Corridor. A snowmobile corridor through the non-motorized zone will provide access to snowmobiling opportunities in the Bunny Buster/Felicity basin and to the guided only snowmobile opportunity beyond Westridge. This corridor is also intended to provide access to the YORA cabin and access for sled-skiing on the eastern slopes of Westridge.

[8] These closures are not intended to block access for commercial or public opportunities beyond the closures. Requirements for corridors will be dealt with on a site specific basis as the SRMP is implemented.
[9] If heliski operations end earlier than closure end dates then the end date will be changed to the end of operations.
[10] Snowmobile access to Dave Henry Lodge will be maintained.
[11] Notification will be by email as soon as possible when YORA knows of the use.

- Sled-Skiing Zone. Sled-skiing and boarding on the eastern slopes of Westridge. There is significant potential for enhancement of these ski runs through appropriately designed forest harvesting blocks.
- Snowmobile Closure Zone. A snowmobile closure for all of the ski zone except for the corridor.

3. **Development of Sled-Skiing on Crystal Ridge.** Establishment of a sled assisted skiing/boarding zone on Crystal ridge (see map A) will increase the opportunities for local skiing/boarding. There is significant potential for enhancement of these ski runs through appropriately designed forest harvesting blocks and strategically located trails.

SRMP Objectives- Westridge and Crystal Ridge

4. Establish recreational snowmobile closures as per map C with time limitations outlined in Table 1.
5. Establish Westridge Destination Ski Area with identified Cat-Ski, Non-motorized, Snowmobile corridor, sled-skiing and snowmobile closure zones.
6. Establish snowmobile assisted skiing/boarding zone at Crystal Ridge

Other Opportunities

There are other winter recreation development opportunities that require detailed investigation on a site specific basis including:

1. **Helicopter and Snowmobile assisted ski touring - This** activity has potential for local and visiting recreational skiers as well as the development of a guided ski product that would add to the diversity and marketability of the area as a ski destination.

2. **Hut-to-hut backcountry ski touring** – There are a number of locations where hut to hut product could be developed including along the Cariboo traverse and in the Clemina and Robina area.

3. **Dogsledding.** There is potential to further develop a dogsledding adventure product in the area.

This list is not intended to exclude other winter recreation activities that may have potential presently or in the future.[12]

Commercial Guiding and Tenuring

Expansion of guiding services to support winter recreation activities like snowmobiling and ski touring requires small business development with potential benefits to local communities and the local economy. The proposed recreation zoning scheme identifies some of the areas where new tenured guiding services can be provided (e.g. snowmobile guides in the guided only snowmobile zones and in the destination area). In addition to these areas, a cooperative approach between existing tenured operations and new applicants can help develop the new opportunities. Building on the commitments made in the Stakeholder Agreement, existing winter recreation businesses should support development of new guiding services to help diversify the economy.

SRMP Objectives

7. Explore and fully consider the potential for development/expansion of undeveloped winter recreation activities including helicopter and snowmobile assisted ski touring, hut to hut ski touring and dogsledding. Provide new tenure opportunities to support these activities where needed.

[12] Note: The closures proposed in this SRMP are not intended to limit the development of compatible activities.

Sustaining Environment and Wildlife

Impacts on the environment and wildlife from recreational activity and development are addressed at the strategic level in the SRMP and at the operational level during development and management planning (e.g. development or revision to a management plan associated with a tenure or a Management Agreement). There are operational guidelines to manage environmental and wildlife impacts from recreation developed by both recreation user groups and Water Land and Air Protection. Given the level of concern for Mtn. Caribou, which are a red listed species, and the potential impacts on Caribou from motorized winter recreation the SRMP provides more extensive direction to reduce risk to Caribou, and improve understanding of the impacts, than it does for other species. This is achieved through a combination of snowmobile closures in key Caribou habitat, strategic management objectives, and detailed operational procedures to guide commercial activities and cooperative research and monitoring.[13] Mountain goats and Grizzly bears are also a recreation management concern and strategic direction is provided with respect to them as well.

SRMP Objectives

General Objective for Environment and Wildlife

10. Periodically update existing recreation management plans to better reflect the best available wildlife inventory, guidelines and monitoring procedures.
11. Design winter recreation infrastructure and conduct winter recreation activities in such a way as to avoid and mitigate impacts on the environment, wildlife populations and habitat.
12. Enhance public awareness of key wildlife habitats and appropriate recreation practices in the vicinity of these habitats.

Mtn. Caribou Objectives

13. Conduct winter recreation operations in a manner that avoids displacement and disturbance of Mtn. Caribou, particularly in core early and late winter ranges.
14. Reduce risks to Mtn. Caribou by closing the areas identified on map E to recreational snowmobiling.
15. Apply and refine best management practices to reduce risk of disturbance or displacement of Mtn. Caribou from winter recreation activity.
16. Integrate best recreation management practices and improved information regarding Mtn. Caribou into commercial recreation tenure and Management Agreement Management Plans to reduce risk of disturbance or displacement to Mtn. Caribou.
17. Locate and design recreation infrastructure in a manner that avoids displacement and disturbance of Mtn. Caribou.

[13] The boundaries of recreational snowmobile closures for caribou, and the management direction regarding caribou, is ongoing and will be completed as this SRMP is finalized.

18. Ensure effective management of snowmobiling in the Managed Snowmobile Areas that overlap caribou habitat including:
    a. provision of information to snowmobilers regarding the location of closures (signs and maps);
    b. compliance and enforcement of caribou closures;
    c. provision of information to snowmobilers regarding appropriate behavior if caribou are in the areas.
19. Provide public information regarding the threatened status of the Mtn. Caribou in the area and related recreation management objectives and strategies.
20. Ensure the SRMP Mtn. Caribou management, monitoring and research directions are coordinated with related Mtn. Caribou research and planning initiatives (e.g. Recovery Implementation Groups).
21. Commercial recreation tenure holders and Management Agreement holders should work cooperatively with each other and with responsible provincial agencies, FNs and public interest groups to implement monitoring and research programs that:
    a. assess the status of the Mtn. Caribou population on an ongoing basis;
    b. monitor compliance with the SRMP Mtn. Caribou management direction;
    c. assess the effectiveness of the SRMP Mtn. Caribou management direction
    d. improve understanding of the impacts of different winter recreational activities on Mtn. Caribou.

Mountain Goats:

22. Incorporate measures into the design of winter recreation infrastructure, and the conduct of winter recreation activities to:
    a. maintain the natural distribution and abundance of mountain goats;
    b. maintain the functional integrity of mountain goat habitat
    c. avoid displacement of goats from their winter and kidding/early ranges, and;
    d. minimize stress caused by human disturbance and avoid disruption to natural behaviour patterns

Grizzly Bears:

23. Incorporate measures into winter recreation activities and developments that:
    a. minimize impact on grizzly bear habitat and denning sites
    b. prevent bear access to human supplied foods, and;
    c. minimize bear / human conflicts.

Improving Integration with other Industrial Users

This winter recreation SRMP chapter provides information that is intended to assist integrated planning for other industrial activities. Building on the commitments made in the Stakeholder Agreement recreational interests need to work together with forest companies and Timber Sales BC to maximize the integration of forest development activities and winter recreation opportunities. This integration can involve cutblock design, as well as priorities for forestry development, access and road deactivation.

SRMP Objectives

24. Integrate winter recreation activities with the management of other resource uses (e.g. forestry and mining) to optimize the economic and social benefits derived.

3.0 Cooperative Management & Implementation

Implementation of this SRMP involves cooperation and partnerships between Governments, non-government organizations and the private sector. These may be formalized through Implementation Agreements, Memoranda of Understanding or other joint working arrangements. These arrangements are intended to support achievement of management objectives and ensure efficient use of available human and financial resources within Government and outside.

Implementation Agreements are expected or encouraged for:

- Public Education and Safety. Involving the Snowpatrol, the Heli-ski companies, local snowmobile groups, CDC, Ministry of Forests.
- Management and Enforcement. Involving the Conservation Officer Service, the Snowpatrol, the Heli-ski companies, the local snowmobile groups, the CDC, Land and Water BC and Ministry of Forests.
- Integrated Management and Development. Involving the CDC, other winter recreation groups, Forest Licensees, Heli-ski companies and relevant Government agencies.

The SRMP is intended to be consistent with the overlapping Land and Resource Management Plans (Robson Valley and Kamloops) and compatible with the recently developed Crown Land Plan in the Valemount area. Improved integration with these other plans will occur as the SRMP is finalized and throughout implementation.

Management Principles

The following principles are proposed as a foundation for cooperative management and implementation and the basis for developing and managing winter recreation in the area.

- Governments, businesses and residents should work together in an open, fair and productive environment to build the area into a more attractive year-round destination and service center for backcountry activities, soft adventure and eco-tourism.
- Local businesses, stakeholders and governments need to take a leadership role and provide the required coordination effort and sustained commitment to achieve the vision.
- A carefully planned and well managed range of winter recreation products such as snowmobiling and commercial snowmobile tours, helicopter skiing, backcountry skiing, snow-cat skiing, sled-skiing, dog-sledding, and alpine (downhill) skiing have the potential to diversify and strengthen the area's economy.
- A range of planning, infrastructure, communication, education, and enforcement tools are necessary to achieve the vision. Given that many recreationists are

independent, public education is essential to achieve management objectives and compliance should be promoted in a collaborative and positive manner.
- It is essential to cultivate respect amongst recreation groups, and for the environment, to enhance implementation of the SRMP.
- Governments, businesses and residents need to be aware of the inherent risks that are associated with winter backcountry mountain recreation, and recognize the need to ensure that public and commercial activities are managed to provide the safest possible experience for residents and visitors to widely acceptable and consistently improving standards of hazard awareness, loss prevention and risk management.

Community Development Corporation

The Stakeholder Agreement includes a commitment to create a new community based management and development organization called the Community Development Corporation (CDC). The CDC will be based in Valemount and is intended to:

- provide enhanced management and development for snowmobiling in the area including taking on formal responsibility for managing the managed snowmobile areas;
- raise funds to support sustainable development of snowmobiling;
- provide snowpatrol services;
- apply for and provide tenure management support for snowmobile tour guides;
- potentially support the development of other recreational opportunities.

Establishment of the CDC is currently underway under the direction of a steering committee that includes: Village of Valemount, Thompson Nicola Regional District, Fraser Fort George Regional District, Valemount and Area Trails Society, Timberline SnoGoers, Yellowhead Outdoor Recreation Association, Canoe Mountain Resorts, Canadian Mountain Holidays and Mike Wiegele Helisking.

Public Education and Safety

Maintaining and improving the safety of winter recreationalists is a critical priority. Local Stakeholders are committed to working collaboratively with the Provincial Government and Local Government to:

1. ***Improve Public Awareness.*** This includes developing maps and signage to identify recreation zones and trails, hazards, recreation activity closures and limitations, and wildlife habitat/closures. Maps should be made publicly available at trailheads and cabins, snowmobile shops, the Valemount and Blue River tourist information centers, accommodation facilities and lodges, restaurants, and through commercial operations.

2. ***Improve Avalanche Awareness.*** This includes providing recreational avalanche courses. CMH, MWH and the CDC are committed to supporting formal and informal avalanche training courses in the local communities for locals and visitors.

3. ***Provide winter recreation training opportunities for youth*** – An example commitment is that MWH is developing a Ski Guide training program in

association with University College of the Cariboo in Kamloops and the Kamloops School District, (the Blue River Academy), which will provide opportunities for grade 12 students to become certified guides. MWH will seek annual sponsorship for a Valemount grade 12 student to enter this program starting in 04/05.

4. ***Improve Communications.*** This involves improving communications between government enforcement authorities, the snowmobile patrol and heli/snowmobile guides, other operators and rental shops to facilitate coordination of recreational activities and the safety of all.

5. ***Develop and Promote a Code of Ethics.*** This code will address issues like:
   - Conduct when different user groups meet.
   - Protection of infrastructure needed by different users (i.e. signs/stakes/ equipment)
   - Awareness of other users and danger of triggering avalanches above them.
   - Conduct when encountering wildlife
   - Maintaining the integrity of the environment

6. ***Qualify and Promote Snowmobile Guides.*** This includes developing improved programs, guidelines and a system of education to provide appropriate snowmobile specific training and certification for snowmobile guides. Visiting snowmobilers will be encouraged to use guides.

7. ***Expand the Snow Patrol***. The target is two appropriately trained and certified patrol in every managed snowmobile area including Westridge. The functions of the patrol include:
   - Provide assistance and information to the public riding in the managed areas regarding terrain difficulty, hazards, closures, and appropriate response when wildlife are encountered.
   - Monitoring snowmobile activity.
   - Communicate and coordinate with heli-ski and snowmobile guides to reinforce coordinated use and safety and rescues where required.
   - Observe, record, and report, and work in conjunction with enforcement officials (RCMP, Forests Service Officers, Conservation Officers and Land Officers).
   - Maintain statistics and records

8. ***Improve Search and Rescue.*** This involves relevant parties working together to enhance search and rescue capacity in the valley including coordinating with the Provincial Emergency Program.

Management and Enforcement

Integrated and collaborative management and enforcement is essential to achieving the SRMP Management Objectives. In particular, specific implementation agreements are required for:

- Cooperation between Heli-ski and snowmobile operators in Guided Only Snowmobile areas.

- Managing snowmobile use levels in the Horseshoe area and the Foster Buster area.
- Coordinated enforcement.

Controlled Recreation Area

Within the stakeholder agreement and the draft SRMP there are several innovative proposals.[14] *These conceptual proposals are being presented for public review and comment. Implementation mechanisms and alternatives for the SRMP are under investigation within the provincial government.* One of these is a Controlled Recreation Area (CRA). CRAs are applied in specific areas where the intensity of activity and resource value requires more concentrated management. CRAs place more management responsibility on commercial operators to ensure the safe and orderly use of the designated area. They are established as part of a commercial tenure. In this context, CRAs can be applied in part of a snowmobile closure zone where there are very high value heli-ski runs and a need for enhanced management and enforcement of the snowmobile closure.

A CRA designation does not affect existing (as per this SRMP) and or compatible recreation activities or tenured uses. Map F identifies proposed CRAs.

SRMP Objectives
25. Establish CRA's in the locations identified on Map F

Integrated Management and Development.

Local stakeholders are committed to working collaboratively with Forest Licensees to integrate forestry and recreational development opportunities. This kind of collaboration is currently underway in the 8 Peaks SRMP Area and has been practiced less comprehensively in the Valemount area. Integrated forestry development has significant potential to enhance the achievement of the SRMP recreation management objectives.

Plan Review and Monitoring

Every two years, the Ministry of Sustainable Resource Management (MSRM) will conduct a review of the approved SRMP Chapters to assess progress in Chapter implementation. Every five years, the MSRM Regional Director will conduct a review of the approved SRMP Chapters to assess the extent to which the Chapters are effective in achieving defined objectives. Where regional interpretation of effectiveness monitoring results shows that the objectives are not effective in achieving stated planning Chapter objectives, the MSRM Regional Director will coordinate the development of measures to improve effectiveness. The MSRM Regional Director will undertake these reviews in collaboration with all affected interests.

MSRM recognizes that new information will become available that may require revisiting portions of this planning Chapter and therefore will monitor implementation of this Chapter accordingly. This SRMP Chapter and/or the legal objectives established to

[14] Note: the SRMP includes a number of innovative proposals. Implementation mechanisms and alternatives for the SRMP are under investigation within the provincial government.

implement it may be subject to review at times other than the specified two/five year scheduled review, in order to address issues that arise. There are a number of issues that will likely arise in the near future, such as the impact of increasing levels of recreational activity on recreational experiences and the environment. , which will have to be addressed through revisions and amendments to the winter recreation SRMP.

Valemount to Blue River Draft SRMP
Summary of Public Feedback

Note: The following summary is intended to reflect the range of feedback, not all the details.

Primary Themes in Feedback:

1. Snowmobile Closures
   Snowmobile respondents are concerned about the effect of proposed closures on snowmobiling opportunities. There is less concern where these closures are to protect caribou. Proposed time limitations for closures are not seen to be meaningful as snowmobiling opportunities after the end of April are very limited. The primary reasons given for lack of support for closures include lack of fairness/balance in the distribution and amount of area for snowmobiling and heliskiing/backcountry skiing in the draft plan, and the feeling that public/recreational snowmobiling opportunities should not be curtailed to support commercial interests. Some perceive incompatibility of skiing and snowmobiling in the same location and the need for separation but are concerned that the draft plan is not balanced in this regard.

   Heli-ski, environmental and some ski touring feedback is supportive of the proposed closures.

2. Guided Only Areas
   Snowmobile respondents are generally not supportive of guided only areas. They indicate that their access to areas should not be contingent upon them having to hire a guide. Many are supportive of guided snowmobiling but not if it is mandatory.
   Other parties (notably heli-ski) see the guided only areas as an innovation that will increase compatibility and reduce risks of accidents.

3. Controlled Recreation Areas - CRA s
   Snowmobilers, environmental interests and other recreation interests (non-heli-ski) are concerned about government divesting responsibility for public recreation to commercial operators through a CRA - corporate control — in the backcountry. There is some support for CRA s in fewer areas. There is also concern that CRA s will effect all recreation opportunities.
   Heli-ski companies see CRA s as a mechanism to increase the security of investments, safety, and the related management and enforcement capacity given the limitations in government staff and financial resources.

4. Economic Impact/Benefits
   Many Snowmobile respondents have emphasized the amount of money they spend in local communities, particularly Valemount, and feel that the closures

could compromise these economic benefits because their snowmobiling opportunities will have been reduced.
Ski touring and other local interests expressed concern regarding the need for more opportunity for local business development such as ski touring and the need for areas designated to support these developments.
Some snowmobilers suggest that increased economic benefit could be derived from the proposed trail development from Clearwater to Valemount and by connecting the managed snowmobile areas.
Some snowmobile interests would like Blue River to gain greater economic benefit from snowmobiling and they are concerned that the draft plan will foreclose opportunities for this to happen.
Heli-ski companies are concerned that their businesses and related income and employment are threatened by the increasing capacity of snowmobiles to access mountain terrain and heli-ski runs. They point out that the use of ski runs by snowmobiles and skiers is not possible because of the impact of snowmobiles on snow conditions and the increased risk associated with either user triggering an avalanche that harms the other user.

5. Environment/Wildlife
Environmental interests expressed concern that caribou habitats that may be closed to snowmobiling may remain open to heli-skiing which can also effect caribou, and raise questions about the impact of winter recreation on other species. They are very concerned about the declining state of the caribou population.
Recreational closures to protect caribou are generally supported by all participants.

6. Implementation and Enforcement
Some snowmobiler respondents suggest that the closures that support heli-ski and backcountry ski interests should be phased in to enable demonstration of cooperation in shared areas.
Several snowmobile and wildlife interests suggest that licensing or some other form of identification is required for all snowmobiles for effective enforcement. The proposed ATV Act is supported by some as a means to license and insure which will enable use of trails that cross public roads.

5. Ski Touring and other winter recreation opportunities
Ski touring respondents suggest that more areas be designated for non-motorized activity and some point out that ski touring and heli-skiing are incompatible in the same location.
Ski touring and ice climbing enthusiasts point out that snowmobiles are also used to access other winter recreation opportunities, rather than to ride for the pleasure, and some of the proposed closures would limit access to these other opportunities.

6. Process

Environmental and non-motorized backcountry recreation interests express concerns that the stakeholder negotiation process did not incorporate all interests and particularly that non-motorized and environmental interests were not strongly represented.

Environmental, non-motorized backcountry recreation and some snowmobile interests express concerns that the time period for public review and feedback is too short.

Plan Area Summary

	Existing (Ha)	Proposed (Ha)	Total Area (Ha)
Managed Snowmobile Zone			
Existing Areas (Miledge, Allan, Clemina)	8,700	0	8,700
Reopen portion of Westridge	0	560	560
Develop Oasis, Robina and North Thompson valley bottom	0	6,900	6,900
Family areas at Westridge (low elevation easy riding on trails in timbered areas)	0	3,600	3,600
Horsey Creek Proposal	0	21,000	21,000
Total	8,700	32,060	40,760
North Thompson Snowmobile Destination Area			
Includes Clemina, Robina, Allen, Oasis, North Thompson Valley bottom, Miledge	0	65,000	65,000
Area no longer under Heli-ski tenure includes Clemina, Robina, Allen, Oasis (except for several specific forested runs), part of north Thompson Valley Bottom		Approx. 55,000	55,000
Non Motorized Backcountry Recreation			
At Westridge near YORA cabin	0	340	340
At Robina near YORA cabin	0	500	500
Total	0	840	840
Snowmobile Assisted Skiing/boarding Area			
Westridge (Presently no access due to snowmobile closure)	0	328	328
Crystal Ridge Proposed (needs trail access development)	0	2,307	2,307
Total	0	2,635	2,635
Snow Cat-ski Zone			
Snowcat now	1,840		1,840
Snowcat proposed (overlays downhill ski area map reserve)	0	1,640	1,640
Tete Snowcat proposed	0	1,640	1,640
New Managed Total	1,840	3,280	5,120
Guided Snowmobiling Zone			
Includes part of Dixon Glacier and Westridge which are currently Closed to snowmobiling	0	12,200	12,200
Backcountry and Helicopter Ski Zone			
Various locations - Total	0	105,828	105,828
Snowmobile Closure Zones			
Mountain Caribou	Approx. 20,000	79,000	101,000
Recreation	2,300	109,700	112,000
Total	22,300	188,700	213,000
Controlled Recreation Area			
Various locations - total		17,447	17,447
Totals			
Total Plan Area			697,000
Recreational Snowmobile Closures *			213,000
Area open to Recreational Snowmobiling *			484,000

* NOTE : These gross numbers do not reflect the actual area that is useable for snowmobiling because much of the terrain is unsuitable (i.e. forested slopes, steep alpine, glaciated with crevasses or inaccessible - this could be as much as 80% of the mountain terrain). It is difficult to accurately estimate the potential snowmobile area inside and outside the snowmobile closures. This was a key consideration in the stakeholder negotiation process and the majority of the area that is closed is either not suitable for snowmobiling or accessible to advanced riders only. There are several locations that are suitable and were used by more advanced riders that will be closed until the end of April including: the McAndrew Lake area in the North Thompson, Adolph Creek and Thunder lakes (previously closed by local agreement). Snowmobile opportunities have been expanded by reducing the closure area on Westridge and proposing improved access and management at Oasis and Robina. Respect for all user groups is encouraged where uses overlap.